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**Eighth Circuit Directs District Court to Grant Injunction, Reinstating Biblical Program in Joint Victory for UMLC and True North Legal**

**(Minnetonka, MN)** - In a significant victory for free speech and religious liberty, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit today reversed a lower court's decision and ordered the District Court to grant a preliminary injunction to reinstate a voluntary men's program that had been canceled by the Minnesota Department of Corrections (MDOC). The victory was a joint effort between the [Upper Midwest Law Center](#) (UMLC) and [True North Legal](#).

The ruling in *Schmitt v. Rebertus* grants a preliminary injunction to Anthony Schmitt, a Christian volunteer who taught the "Quest for Authentic Manhood" program at a Minnesota correctional facility. The Eighth Circuit found that Schmitt is likely to succeed on the merits of his First Amendment claims and ordered that the program be reinstated while the case proceeds to a full trial.

The lawsuit was filed after the MDOC terminated the program, stating in a letter that it "directly conflicts with the diversity, equity, and inclusivity values of the department by defining manhood, or the study of masculinity, through a biblical lens of what a 'real man looks like.'"

The appellate court's opinion, written by Judge Smith, found that the MDOC's decision was not a neutral one. Instead, it was an act of viewpoint discrimination, which is unconstitutional. The court ruled that although the MDOC set forth a "legitimate governmental interest" in inmate rehabilitation, its termination of the program failed because it was not applied in a "neutral fashion, without regard to the content of the expression." The court concluded that the MDOC's objection was to the program's religious viewpoint on masculinity.

*"The court's decision is a clear victory against viewpoint discrimination," said Alexandra Howell, UMLC Trial and Appellate Counsel. "The MDOC attempted to cancel a program based on its religious content simply because it didn't align with a preferred political ideology. The Eighth Circuit correctly found that the First Amendment does not allow for such censorship.*



*We are incredibly proud to have partnered with True North Legal to secure this victory for Mr. Schmitt and for religious liberty for all Americans.”*

*“All I wanted to do was provide hope and a new path for men who are looking for a way forward in their lives,” said Anthony Schmitt, plaintiff in the case. “The Quest program has a proven track record of helping men change for the better. The MDOC’s decision was hurtful and unfair, and I am fighting to ensure these men can continue to get the spiritual guidance they need.”*

*“The court’s opinion is long-awaited good news for our client, Tony Schmitt, and many inmates who have benefited from the Quest Program, a voluntary faith-based program with proven results,” said Renee Carlson, General Counsel at True North Legal. “The court’s decision is also a victory for all Minnesotans, in that it sends a clear message to the government about protecting our first freedoms and religious liberty: simply put, government cannot target Minnesotans for acting in accordance with their religious beliefs with which the government disagrees.”*

The case now returns to the U.S. District Court in Minnesota.

[Click here to read the decision.](#)

*About Upper Midwest Law Center:*

*The [Upper Midwest Law Center](#) is a non-profit public interest law firm committed to upholding constitutional rights and the rule of law. UMLC advocates for the protection of individual liberties and the preservation of constitutional principles through strategic litigation and advocacy efforts.*

*About True North Legal*

*The [True North Legal](#) is a Minnesota-based public interest law firm dedicated to defending and advancing the constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals, families, and organizations.*

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